

EXHIBIT Q

How a Columbia Student Fled to Canada After ICE Came Looking for Her

Ranjani Srinivasan's student visa was revoked by U.S. immigration authorities. That was just the start of her odyssey.



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By **Luis Ferré-Sadurní and Hamed Aleaziz**

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The first knock at the door came eight days ago, on a Friday morning.

Three federal immigration agents showed up at a Columbia University apartment searching for Ranjani Srinivasan, who had recently learned her student visa had been revoked. Ms. Srinivasan, an international student from India, did not open the door.

She was not home when the agents showed up again the next night, just hours before a former Columbia student living in campus housing, Mahmoud Khalil, was detained, roiling the university. Ms. Srinivasan packed a few belongings, left her cat behind with a friend and jumped on a flight to Canada at LaGuardia Airport.

When the agents returned a third time, this past Thursday night, and entered her apartment with a judicial warrant, she was gone.

"The atmosphere seemed so volatile and dangerous," Ms. Srinivasan, 37, said on Friday in an interview with The New York Times, her first public remarks since leaving. "So I just made a quick decision."

Ms. Srinivasan, a Fulbright recipient who was pursuing a doctoral degree in urban planning, was caught in the dragnet of President Trump's crackdown on pro-Palestinian demonstrators through the use of federal immigration powers. She is one of a handful of noncitizens that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has targeted at Columbia in recent days.

In the week since that first knock at the door, Ms. Srinivasan says she has struggled to understand why the State Department abruptly revoked her student visa without explanation, leading Columbia to withdraw her enrollment from the university because her legal status had been terminated.



Ranjani Srinivasan was pursuing a Ph.D. in urban planning at Columbia. Ranjani Srinivasan

On Friday, while considering her future in Canada, she received some answers.

The Department of Homeland Security issued a statement that characterized Ms. Srinivasan as a terrorist sympathizer and accused her of advocating violence and being “involved in activities supporting Hamas, a terrorist organization.” The department did not provide any evidence for its allegations.

Kristi Noem, the homeland security secretary, posted surveillance footage on social media that showed Ms. Srinivasan lugging a suitcase at LaGuardia as she fled to Canada. Secretary Noem celebrated Ms. Srinivasan’s departure as a “self-deportation.”

“It is a privilege to be granted a visa to live & study in the United States of America,” Secretary Noem wrote on X. “When you advocate for violence and terrorism that privilege should be revoked and you should not be in this country.”

Ms. Srinivasan’s lawyers have vehemently denied those allegations and have accused the Trump administration of revoking her visa for engaging in “protected political speech,” saying she was denied “any meaningful form of due process” to challenge the visa revocation.

“Secretary Noem’s tweet is not only factually wrong but fundamentally un-American,” Naz Ahmad, one of Ms. Srinivasan’s lawyers, said in a statement, adding: “For at least a week, D.H.S. has made clear its intent to punish her for her speech, and they have failed in their efforts.”

In response to questions, officials with the Homeland Security Department said that when Ms. Srinivasan renewed her visa last year, she failed to disclose two court summonses related to protests on Columbia’s campus. The department did not say how the summonses made her a terrorist sympathizer.

“I’m fearful that even the most low-level political speech or just doing what we all do — like shout into the abyss that is social media — can turn into this dystopian nightmare where somebody is calling you a terrorist sympathizer and making you, literally, fear for your life and your safety,” Ms. Srinivasan said in the interview on Friday.

Ms. Srinivasan's current situation can be traced back to last year, when she was arrested at an entrance to Columbia's campus the same day that pro-Palestinian protesters occupied Hamilton Hall, a university building. She said she had not been a part of the break-in but was returning to her apartment that evening after a picnic with friends, wading through a churning crowd of protesters and barricades on West 116th Street, when the police pushed her and arrested her.

She was briefly detained and received two summonses, one for obstructing vehicular or pedestrian traffic and another for refusing to disperse. Her case was quickly dismissed and did not result in a criminal record, according to her lawyers and court documents. Ms. Srinivasan said that she never faced disciplinary action from the university and was in good academic standing.

"She was taken in with roughly 100 other people after being blocked from returning to her apartment and getting stuck in the street," said Nathan Yaffe, one of her lawyers. "The court recognized this when it dismissed her case as having no merit. Ranjani was just trying to walk home."

Ms. Srinivasan said she did not disclose the summonses in the visa renewal form later in the year because her case had been dismissed in May and she did not have a conviction.

"Because I had not and the charges were dismissed, I sort of marked it as 'no,'" she said. "But maybe that was my mistake. I would have been happy to disclose that, but just the way they had questioned us was sort of assuming that you had a conviction."

The State Department has broad discretion to revoke student visas, which it typically does if someone overstays or the government discovers fraud; convictions and arrests can also lead to revocations. Immigration lawyers said it was highly unusual for ICE to descend on college campuses searching for students with recently revoked visas as the agency has the past few days at Columbia, rattling many students.

"It is more rare for the government to act the way it has, such as in the cases in Columbia University, where they're going on campus and conducting an operation to apprehend somebody," said Greg Chen, a lawyer at the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

The Trump administration's targeting of students with visas at a university enveloped in a cultural firestorm opened a new front in the president's attempts to ramp up deportations and tamp down pro-Palestinian views. The president canceled \$400 million in grants to the university after accusing it of failing to protect Jewish students. The arrests and attempted detentions of the Columbia students has led to an uproar among Democrats and civil rights groups.

Jason Houser, a senior ICE official during the Biden administration, said that "criminalizing free speech through radicalized immigration enforcement is a direct attack on our democracy."

Last week, ICE arrested Mr. Khalil, a green card holder who had become a leading face of the pro-Palestinian protests at Columbia. Mr. Trump hailed the arrest as "the first of many to come." On Friday, the Department of Homeland Security announced that it had arrested Leqaa Kordia, who had been involved in the protests at Columbia. Federal officials said she had overstayed her visa and had previously been arrested at a Columbia protest in April.

Unlike Mr. Khalil, Ms. Srinivasan said she was not an activist or a member of any group that organized demonstrations on campus.

Ms. Srinivasan said she was an architect who came to the United States from India as part of the Fulbright program in 2016 and that she enrolled at Columbia in 2020. She said she was in the fifth year of an urban planning doctoral program at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, and was supposed to graduate in May.

She said that her activity on social media had been mostly limited to liking or sharing posts that highlighted "human rights violations" in the war in Gaza. And she said that she had signed several open letters related to the war, including one

by architecture scholars that called for “Palestinian liberation.”

“I’m just surprised that I’m a person of interest,” she said. “I’m kind of a rando, like, absolute rando,” she said, using slang for random.

It was March 5 when she received an email from the U.S. Consulate in Chennai, India, indicating that her visa had been revoked. The notice did not provide a reason, saying only that “information has come to light” that may make her ineligible for a visa.

Confused, she emailed Columbia’s office for international students the following day seeking guidance. An official informed her that the revocation would take effect only if she left the country and that she could remain in the United States to pursue her studies for the time being, according to emails reviewed by The Times.

The next morning, on March 7, Ms. Srinivasan was on a call with an official from the international student office when the federal agents first knocked on the door of her apartment, which is off campus but operated by Columbia. The official told Ms. Srinivasan to call campus security, while her roommate engaged with the agents from behind the closed apartment door.

In an interview, her roommate said that the agents had initially identified themselves as “police,” declined to provide their badge numbers, saying they feared they would be doxxed, and stood to the side of the door so that they were not visible through the peep hole. The roommate, a fellow Columbia student who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear for her safety, said that the building’s doorman, who is an immigrant, later told her that he had let the three agents into the building because he was frightened.

Ms. Srinivasan abandoned the apartment that night, so she was not there when officials returned the following evening. Her roommate once again refused to open the door to let them in and recorded audio of the interaction, which she shared with The Times.

"We were here yesterday," one of the officials says, believing he was talking to Ms. Srinivasan because the roommate had not identified herself. "We're here today. We're here tonight. Tomorrow. You're probably scared. If you are, I get it. The reality is, your visa was revoked. You are now amenable to removal proceedings."

The official stressed that he and his colleagues were not trying to break the law, that she would have the right to go before an immigration judge and left a phone number for the Homeland Security Department that she could call if she had "a change of heart."

"That's the easiest and fastest way to do this, as opposed to you being in your apartment and us knocking on your door every day, which is just silly," he said. "You're a very smart person. It's just not — it's not worth it."

The next day, Ms. Srinivasan received an email from Columbia saying that homeland security had alerted the university that her visa had been revoked and her legal status in the country had been terminated. Because she had to immediately leave the United States, the email said, her enrollment at Columbia had been withdrawn and she had to vacate student housing.

The email, signed by the university's international student office, said that, in compliance with its legal obligations, Columbia was asking her to meet with the homeland security agents. The university declined to comment on Ms. Srinivasan's case.

On Thursday night, three federal agents returned to Ms. Srinivasan's apartment with a search warrant signed by a judge and went inside to search for her, according to her roommate and lawyers.

By then, Ms. Srinivasan was already in Canada.

Edward Wong contributed reporting. Alain Delaquérière contributed research.

A correction was made on March 15, 2025: An earlier version of this article, relying on information provided by a spokesperson, misstated the surname of one of Ranjani Srinivasan's lawyers. She is Naz Ahmad, not Ahmed.

When we learn of a mistake, we acknowledge it with a correction. If you spot an error, please let us know at nynews@nytimes.com. Learn more

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